

Assassination Showdown Is Unpredictable

By Jeremiah O'Leary

Washington Star Staff Writer

The House is headed for a close and unpredictable vote tomorrow on whether the Select Committee on Assassinations will continue to exist.

Complex forces are gathering on both sides of the question in a way that transcends standard political and ideological considerations. The fight now involves not only the question of reopening the murders of President John F. Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. but the personal feud between the former chairman, Henry B. Gonzalez, D-Tex., and committee chief counsel Richard A. Sprague.

The investigation was allowed, by a vote of 237-164, to continue until March 31. It is expected that tomorrow's vote will be much closer. Those who are opposed to reopening the probes at all are now being joined by members who are outraged by the humiliation of Gonzalez in his battle with the committee staff employee, Sprague. Gonzalez tried to fire Sprague and then himself resigned when the rest of the committee refused to back him up.

GONZALEZ, apparently determined to fight down to the wire, harangued the House for an hour yesterday on his well-publicized reasons for terminating the services of the former Philadelphia prosecutor. He stopped short of actually accusing the House leadership of failing to support him but declared, "I think I have been treated shabbily. If my name had been Jones, O'Brien or George Washington Carver, it would have been different."

Speaker Thomas P. O'Neill Jr. sat through the entire Gonzalez speech, taking notes, as the fiery Texan imitated the voices of Rep. Shirley Chisholm, D-N.Y., and Rep. Richardson Preyer, D-N.C., and charged that Sprague had openly defied Majority Leader Jim Wright, D-Tex.

The House Rules Committee meeting followed Gonzalez' speech and may have been an indication of sentiment in the House. After nearly three hours of spirited debate, the Rules Committee voted to pass the resolution along to the House for tomorrow's confrontation. The vote was 9 to 4, with two pro-Gonzalez members voting "present."

THE RESOLUTION on which tomorrow's vote will be taken is whether to continue the committee's authorization and funding for calendar 1977.

Meanwhile, there were these developments on the assassinations probes:

- Sprague and three other committee investigators completed their second interview with James Earl Ray, the self-confessed slayer of King, in Brushy Mountain (Tenn.) Penitentiary yesterday. Ray, who has recanted the guilty plea and wants a new trial, answered questions yesterday for six hours.

- The committee issued a report which declared it is actively pursuing several new leads indicating Lee Harvey Oswald was associated with anti-Castro Cuban groups and which suggest that his trip to Mexico City just before Kennedy was slain may have been designed to mask those associations.